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Viewing cable 09BERLIN1162, GERMANY'S NEXT FOREIGN MINISTER?: THE WORLD

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BERLIN1162	2009-09-18 16:02	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Berlin

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BERLIN 001162

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMANY'S NEXT FOREIGN MINISTER?: THE WORLD
ACCORDING TO FDP CHAIRMAN GUIDO WESTERWELLE

REF: BERLIN 594

Classified By: MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS GEORGE GLASS FO
R REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

¶1. (C//NF) Free Democratic Party (FDP) Chairman Guido Westerwelle may be on the verge of becoming Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor in a Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU)-FDP government after the parliamentary elections on September 27. He has a strong craving for political power and recognition after spending eleven years in opposition. Westerwelle previewed his foreign and security policy objectives and views in a major speech at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) on May 4, a speech for which the media nicknamed him "Guido Genscher," playing on Westerwelle's ideological leanings and close relationship with former FDP Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

¶2. (C//NF) Westerwelle's DGAP remarks provided us with a glimpse of Westerwellian thought. They were short on substance, suggesting that Westerwelle's command of complex foreign and security policy issues still requires deepening if he is to successfully represent German interests on the world stage (see REFTEL). While he is a Transatlanticist, Westerwelle questions the breadth of U.S. power and U.S. calls for stronger German engagement. He also harbors resentment that he has not been taken more seriously by the Washington political establishment. (NOTE: Embassy will report SEPTTEL on more detailed foreign policy implications for the U.S. of a Westerwelle-led MFA). END SUMMARY.

Westerwelle's foreign policy priorities

¶3. (C) Westerwelle's most important foreign policy priorities will be focused on global disarmament and arms control. In remarks in Schwerin on September 17, Westerwelle called again for the removal of all U.S. tactical nuclear weapons -- within the context of negotiations with NATO -- from German soil. He was very critical of the Bush Administration's Missile Defense plans but was quick to praise President Obama's recent announcement on Missile Defense, saying "this move created additional international confidence." Westerwelle remains a committed Transatlanticist but he has been consistently cautious of committing German troops to out-of-area deployments. Afghanistan was the exception. Westerwelle continues to support Germany's ISAF mandate, but he has also indicated that the FDP wants to bring German troops home from Afghanistan as soon as possible provided the mission has been successfully completed. Westerwelle and the FDP support close engagement with Russia and see it as a "strategic partner. Westerwelle has pursued close ties with Russia's leadership during his eleven years in opposition. On Iran, Westerwelle has talked about the need for dialogue but his party's pro-business orientation makes him particularly skeptical of sanctions and resistant to unilateral efforts to cut back trade.

The unlikely foreign minister

¶4. (C//NF) By his own admission, Westerwelle has never seriously harbored a fascination for international affairs. FDP Bundestag member Marina Schuster told PolOff recently that foreign policy is not Westerwelle's "true love," but that he will take this position due to its high profile and as it is tied to the position of Vice-Chancellor. FDP contacts tell us that he plans to remain a foreign policy generalist, which suggests he will have plenty of time to wax lyrical on domestic politics - to the potential detriment of political harmony in a possible future CDU/CSU-FDP coalition. He also finds very appealing the prospect of being one of the only cabinet members besides the chancellor who can choose his media advisors, which suggests that Westerwelle will continue to place great emphasis on cultivating his public image.

¶5. (C//NF) There is a contrast between Westerwelle's increased public support and successful leadership of the FDP versus the continued skepticism, often bordering on contempt,

shown by much of the German foreign policy elite toward him. Opinion polls show that Westerwelle's public image has improved substantially in the last year in particular. But, as one well known foreign policy analyst in Berlin told PolOff, he lacks the gravitas and is seen as too

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opportunistic to be trusted as foreign minister. At the conclusion of his DGAP speech, several MFA desk officers remarked to PolOff that they were not yet persuaded that Westerwelle had the "foreign and security policy expertise necessary" to become a successful Foreign Minister, although they had no doubts about his ability to get up to speed quickly. There was a consensus among desk officers -- driven, perhaps, by political bias -- that Westerwelle was arrogant and too fixated on maintaining his "cult of personality." Negative reaction to his DGAP speech reflects the foreign policy community's skepticism of Westerwelle.

He's no genscher

16. (C//NF) Like Dan Quayle in 1992, Westerwelle wants to compare himself to his mentor, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, but in the eyes of the foreign policy community, he is no Genscher. Nevertheless, Westerwelle's world-views have to a large extent been shaped by "Genscherism." British academic Timothy Garton Ash described "Genscherism" as an attempt "to maintain and improve Germany's ties with a wide range of states, which were themselves pursuing quite different and quite contrary objectives. This complex balancing act involved saying somewhat different things in different places." Genscherism also embraced a foreign policy "culture of restraint," while emphasizing the models of "cooperation" and "continuity" in German foreign policy, which Westerwelle discussed in his May 4 speech at the DGAP. Genscher's "culture of restraint" had a profound influence on Westerwelle's thinking, thus making him very skeptical about committing Germany's armed forces to overseas military operations (NOTE: Afghanistan was an exception, although with the caveat that Germany's area of responsibility there would remain limited to the north and would concentrate on police training and civil reconstruction efforts (SEPTEL). End note).

A transatlanticist with a twist

17. (C//NF) At the June 30 meeting, Westerwelle quickly confirmed his Transatlanticist credentials. Westerwelle's views on the United States' role in the world, however, also defines his brand of Transatlanticism. According to Westerwelle's political biographer Majid Sattar, Westerwelle has never been able to shake his skepticism about how the United States wields power in the world. Citing an exchange with former U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Burt (1985-1989), Sattar recalls how Westerwelle forcefully intervened in a discussion the Ambassador was having on U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War to say: "But you are not the police of the world." Sattar comments further that Westerwelle was immune to any "transatlantic brainwashing." Although Westerwelle used his DGAP speech to criticize the United States under the Bush Administration for its excessive focus on the War on Terror and unilateralism, saying that the United States had lost its compass more than once, Westerwelle quickly changed his tune when he talked about the positive impact that President Obama has had on U.S. foreign policy since his election.

18. (C//NF) Westerwelle also made clear that he believes Germany needs to be more engaged in U.S. policy-making. He criticized Chancellor Merkel for not having been more engaged with Washington on issues of mutual interest, especially arms control, when Washington has been engaged in extensive policy reviews. He suggested that the FDP would quickly fill the vacuum should they enter government.

Westerwelle to washington: what about me?

¶9. (C//NF) Westerwelle has found it hard to conceal his resentment toward Washington based on his feeling that neither its top leadership nor the Embassy in Berlin had courted him during his time in opposition. At a June 30 meeting between the former CDA and Westerwelle, he criticized the Bush Administration for its failure to seek a political dialogue with him. Also revealing was Westerwelle's slight edge on his sense of humor, first charming us by inquiring about Secretary Clinton's health after her elbow injury and next joking that he would ask the Secretary if the Embassy had conveyed his best wishes.

¶10. (C//NF) Partially due to his insistence on only high-level meetings in Washington (and therefore limited contact), Westerwelle remains a relatively unknown political figure in the U.S., although he has traveled there many times. Unlike his future potential cabinet colleague,

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Christian Social Union (CSU) Economics Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, Westerwelle has little professional experience in the United States since he never made extensive efforts to introduce himself to the Washington policy community. Unfortunately, our attempts to reach out to Westerwelle were often rebuffed with the excuse that he would only meet the Ambassador. Only after extensive Embassy negotiations with Westerwelle's staff were former CDA and PolOff able to secure the June 30 meeting.

Comment

¶11. (C//NF) One week before the parliamentary elections, polls indicate that Westerwelle stands a good chance of becoming Germany's next foreign minister, a position he has been preparing for since 2002. If Westerwelle becomes Foreign Minister, we can expect tough love diplomacy from someone who prides himself in being our "close" friend, but who in reality remains skeptical about the U.S. and its foreign policy objectives. Westerwelle will be a friend, but he will not hesitate to criticize us if vital German interests are at stake or being challenged. Westerwelle's prickliness toward the United States would likely be neutralized by the long-sought attention from Washington he would receive if he becomes foreign minister. Germany's foreign policy elite will continue to view him with skepticism. The factor that assuages some of this concern, however, is that no one expects him to be able to match Chancellor Merkel if he does become Foreign Minister, and policy experts tell us that foreign policy influence is likely to shift even further to the Chancellery. END COMMENT.

Bio notes

¶12. (U) Dr. Guido Westerwelle was born on December 27, 1961 in Bad Honnef (near Bonn) to Dr. XXXXX and XXXXX Westerwelle. Family members note that Westerwelle inherited the unbridled, aggressive temperament of his father and the calculated, deliberate, and hesitant cleverness of his mother. His parents divorced when he was 8 years old, which according to Westerwelle himself, left a scar on his educational and physical development. After the divorce, Westerwelle was raised by his father -- a lawyer -- and he maintained a close relationship with his mother, also a career lawyer, who lived nearby. XXXXX and XXXXX, Guido's half brothers, one from each of his parents' previous relationships, were older and soon left the house to live on their own. Westerwelle grew up with his younger brother XXXXX; they were very similar and both were considered active extroverts who enjoyed debates. Westerwelle enjoys horses and to this day he is an avid equestrian.

¶13. (SBU) Westerwelle is openly gay. He has said that this was not a problem at home since he was raised to be self-confident and his family was very liberal. In addition, Bonn, where Westerwelle went to university was a liberal town. Westerwelle officially came out rather quietly in the political world in 2005 at Merkel's 50th birthday party when he brought his partner, Michael Mronz, a sports manager, to the party. Mronz is currently a steering board member of the 2009 Berlin World Track and Field World Championships. Ironically, Westerwelle is conservative on gay rights. He is keen to protect the special status of marriages and families under German law. He opposes adoption by same sex couples but says that he wishes he could have children.

¶14. (U) Westerwelle developed an early taste for politics, being the editor of his high school newspaper. He caused a school controversy when he named teachers who he felt did not respect students who had transferred into the secondary high school system from the grammar school system. As a result of his story, many teachers developed a dislike for Westerwelle. He further developed his political thinking when he attended an event with Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Otto Graf Lambsdorff during the 1980 parliamentary elections. It was at that time that he decided to join the FDP and form an FDP youth group in Bonn. Westerwelle eventually became a lawyer but his younger brother XXXXX once said he had the impression that being a lawyer was never his brother's real goal. His understanding of the media and their use for his own political purposes is envied by many politicians. He takes a pro-active approach to overseeing his party's media operations. In front of the camera, Westerwelle comes across as serious, sharp, and calculating, and almost comical at times with what is perceived as a very exaggerated presence. In person, people say Westerwelle is very gallant, funny, and sarcastic.

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¶15. (U) In his free time, Westerwelle enjoys attending concerts and reading. He enjoys running, beach volleyball, sailing, horseback riding, and mountain biking. He collects paintings from New Leipzig School artists such as Neo Rauch and Tim Eitel and is a fond collector of works by Norbert Bisky and Joerg Immendorff. He enjoys vacationing in Italy and Spain.
Murphy